

Congressman Tracey Mann

**Member Day Remarks
House Transportation & Infrastructure Hearing
April 14, 2021**

Chairman DeFazio, Ranking Member Graves, and Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about transportation and infrastructure priorities from the First District of Kansas.

My district, aptly nicknamed the “Big First”, is the 11th largest Congressional District in the country, spanning 63 counties in central and western Kansas. As you can imagine, with a district that size, we greatly rely on roads, rail, waterways, and other forms of infrastructure to connect our rural communities to one another and to the rest of the world.

The Big First’s backbone is agriculture; it is home to more than 60,000 farms and is made up of farmers, ranchers, feed lot managers,

nutritionists, ethanol producers, ag lenders, and agribusiness owners who feed, fuel, and clothe the world. Farmers and ranchers depend on roads, bridges, and rail to safely transport these goods to market.

From the beginning of planting season to the end of the harvest, and from the time a baby calf hits the ground to the time we take them to town, these forms of transport help to efficiently deliver our agricultural products around the globe.

However, moving livestock and perishable ag commodities brings a separate set of issues for drivers that Kansans are well aware of, as the leader in cattle production. For decades, farmers and ranchers and transporters of agricultural goods across our district and state have fallen victim to archaic trucking regulations leaving little to no room for livestock hauling exemptions.

S. 792, the Haulers of Agriculture and Livestock Safety (HAULS) Act as introduced by Senator Deb Fischer, my neighbor to the north in Nebraska, would address these concerns. The HAULS Act would update the hours-of-service exemptions for ag products and livestock that have been regularly modified by Congress, to provide flexibility to ag and livestock haulers. This bill would add 150 air-miles on the back end of the trip, allowing drivers the extra time to safely navigate the rural roads with their haul. It would also allow the hours-of-service exemptions to continue nationwide all year-round, removing the seasonal limits set by state designated planting and harvest periods.

I am supportive of the work of a coalition of more than 100 ag organizations to modernize the agricultural exemptions to the hours-of-service rule and provide flexibility for haulers and urge the Committee to review the legislation in-full if similar legislation is introduced in the House or if the HAULS Act reaches the House for a vote.

Another important issue for rural districts like mine is aviation, which is supported through the Essential Air Service and Small Community Air Service Development Programs. Both programs ensure that our smaller communities can maintain a minimal level of scheduled air service to larger cities, whether through direct support or by working with communities to address air service issues. As the home state to the Air Capital of the World, Essential Air Service enables communities like Salina, Liberal, Dodge City, Garden City, and Hays to connect to the world through aviation.

As your committee continues work on transportation and infrastructure legislation, we must ensure that rural communities are part of the conversation and a priority in these discussions. Beyond transportation, the importance of broadband cannot be overstated in connecting rural communities to the rest of the country, whether for virtual school, telemedicine, or remote work. Rural broadband must be considered as an

important piece in our infrastructure conversations, whether occurring on this committee or others across Congress.

The roads, highways, rails, aviation, as well as broadband connect all of us across the country and add to the quality of life in rural communities.

Our investments today will promote rural economies long into the future and make our communities a prosperous place to live for the next generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the issues impacting the First District of Kansas, and I yield back the remainder of my time.